



News Release

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CONTACT: Ken August
or Lea Brooks
(916) 440-7660

STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES WARNING NOT TO EAT BIVALVE SHELLFISH AND THE VISCERA OF CRAB FROM SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

SACRAMENTO – Consumers should not eat sport-harvested species of bivalve (two-shelled) shellfish, sardines and anchovies or commercially sold viscera of sardines, anchovies, lobster and crab (commonly known as crab butter) harvested from the San Luis Obispo County coast because they may be contaminated with domoic acid, a naturally occurring toxin that can cause human illness, Interim State Public Health Officer Dr. Howard Backer warned today.

The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) has detected elevated levels of domoic acid in crab samples from San Luis Obispo County. Other seafood, including bivalve shellfish (oysters, clam, mussels or scallops), fish and lobster have not been tested, but could also contain dangerous levels of this toxin.

This advisory is in addition to the current quarantine on the sport-harvesting of mussels along the entire California coastline that took effect May 1.

Domoic acid was first identified in 1991 in samples of mussels, razor clams and other seafood at several locations along the Pacific Coast, including California. No known cases of human poisoning from this toxin are known to have occurred in California. CDHS includes testing of domoic acid and other marine toxins in its biotoxin monitoring program.

Symptoms of domoic acid poisoning include vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, headache, disorientation, seizures and loss of short-term memory. Severe cases may be fatal or result in loss of short-term memory. Older individuals and individuals with impaired kidney function are more vulnerable to the toxic effects of domoic acid.

Consumers are also advised that certain household pets and other animals are susceptible to domoic acid poisoning and should not be fed these products.

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This warning does not apply to commercially sold clams, mussels, scallops or oysters.

State law prohibits the sale or offering for sale for human consumption of any clams, mussels, scallops, or oysters except by a state-certified commercial shellfish harvester or dealer. Shellfish sold by certified harvesters and dealers are subject to frequent mandatory testing.

For more information, consumers can call CDHS' toll-free "Shellfish Information Line," which includes updates on shellfish biotoxins and quarantines, at 1-800-553-4133.